



**THE  
STORY  
OF THE  
MONTEREY  
PINE**

CALIFORNIA



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A NATIVE GROVE

# THE STORY *of the* MONTEREY PINE

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# The Story of the Monterey Pine



IF the old native pines of Monterey could wake from their drowsy dreaming and tell the story of their race, what a story would there be! The glorious days of their ancestors are barely suggested by fossil cones and by traces of the ancient coast that is now covered by the ocean, except for the stray bits of land known as the Channel Islands. Remnants on the coast and islands of today show that this sturdy, shore-loving tree must have been abundant in forests of the long ago.

The hosts of its descendants that still look out upon the Pacific from the hills around Monterey have a firm stand in the rocky soil of a peninsula. Around this knob of land the sea has dashed and toiled for ages without tearing it from the mainland and transforming it into an island. But

"almost an island" this Monterey peninsula really is, with the sweeping curve of Monterey bay on one side of the neck, and the deep cut of Carmel bay on the other; and as for the pine forest on the peninsula, it forms a veritable aboreal island that is shut off from the inland by unfavorable soil and climate. If the sea could break its way through from bay to bay, only a scanty growth of pine would be left on the mainland—a fringe of the old forest that once covered the peninsula.

A lone pine on a windy slope, a mile or two beyond Point Lobos, marks the southern boundary of this aboreal island; but seventy or eighty miles further south, on the San Luis Obispo coast, this pine of Monterey reappears, disappears again, and then is found still further south on three of the offshore islands.

The only native trees living north of Monterey are on the other side of the bay, at Pescadero, about sixty miles up the coast; but fossil cones that have been discovered in the San Francisco bay region, tell something of the earlier range in this direction.

This chain of forest remnants is strung along two or three hundred miles of the California coast, but the stronghold of the Monterey Pine

is its own peninsula, where it spreads over about twenty-five square miles of territory and shares its domain with but few other trees. The live oak is its forest companion; and many a time, when the wind is bent on havoc, a swaying pine is held securely in the arms of a neighboring oak. Other trees of the peninsula are grouped in groves—the Bishop Pine and the Gowen Cypress on Huckleberry Hill, and the Monterey Cypress at Cypress Point and Point Lobos.

When Cabrillo sailed up the coast, nearly four hundred years ago, and caught sight of this untouched forest sweeping up and down the slopes almost to the rocks and sands of the shore, no wonder he called the wooded headland he was rounding, “Cabo de Pinos” and the blue bay at its side “Bahia de Pinos”! Any one of the seventy species of pine that are now known might readily have been recognized as “pines”, but this venturesome sea captain of the sixteenth century lived two or three hundred years too early to possibly suspect his discovery of a new pine.

He sailed on with only a glimpse of these pine-covered slopes. A savage sea had kept him from landing, and for half a century longer it dashed against the rocks and swept back and forth on the sandy beaches, undisturbed by other

explorers. Then Spanish ships again rounded Cabrillo's Cabo de Pinos, in charge of Sebastian Vizcaino.

Vizcaino succeeded in anchoring his ships in the bay, which he describes as "a port sheltered from winds, lying at the side of Punta de los Pinos from which masts of any size might be cut." As he looked upon the forests sloping up from the sea, he had visions of trees transformed into ships that would spread their Spanish sails and fly in and out of the harbor with as much assurance as the long-winged gulls that were riding the waves and fluttering around the rocks on the shore. The Bay of Pines was renamed in honor of the Conde de Monterey, the Mexican viceroy, with the prospect of its becoming a Spanish possession; and the wooded headland on the south was thereafter to be known as Punta de los Pinos.

Then Vizcaino, too, sailed away; and the pines on the shore waved another long farewell to Spanish seamen with their ship-building tendencies; for more than a century and a half passed before the coming of Portolá, when a new era began in the life of the pine forest.

A lone tree here and there gives a hint of the woods that once surrounded San Carlos mission.

Trees on the presidio hill are descendants of the forest of Portolá's time when pines and oaks shaded all the slope, and the historic Vizcaino oak at its base was conspicuous because it was a big oak in a pine forest. If its branches dripped with the tide water, as recorded, many a pine needle from nearby trees must have floated out to sea!

The town of Monterey, that had claimed space for its custom house and a few adobe buildings, soon began spreading up the slopes back of the bay; and pines were forced more and more to give way. Land grants covered the peninsula, and pines came down by hundreds in clearings, in wood and lumber camps.

Later the towns of Pacific Grove, New Monterey, and Carmel were cut out of the forest; and the Seventeen-mile Drive began to wind its way through the woods. The towns called for additions, and the original Drive became but a fraction of the roadway that circled the forest and mounted its slopes.

During these years of human invasion, saws shrieked and axes rang and dynamite thundered. Thousands of pines came crashing down to this symphony of civilization. The forest stretches that surrounded the towns were dotted with



wood camps, and crossed and recrossed by wood roads over which teams of horses hauled out the chopped up trees; smoke from rubbish fires hung in the air or drifted with the fog; and the perfume of pitch from stumps that burned for days floated miles on the wind.

In time something of the old stillness settled again over what remained of the forest; and along the road edges, in the trampled earth of clearings and abandoned wood camps, even in the yellow gravel pits, seeds of fallen pines were sprouting into new trees. They came up like spring grass, in joyous crowds—miniature forests of trees from an inch to several feet high and with the tough fiber of natives of the soil, that would make a brave struggle for a place in their own earth.

Above and around these streaks and patches of bright new green, the dark trees of the old forest stood. But in less than half a century the bits of new forest had matured; and the old trees that had lived out their seventy-five or a hundred years of time, were fast disappearing and leaving the trees of the present generation to take their places.

Though the name of Monterey fell by chance to the pines around Monterey bay, its unpre-

meditated meaning, "pine of the royal forest," gives a happy turn to the chance. "California pine" was the simple name by which it was early known in Europe, where it had been introduced by the French explorer, La Pérouse, who stopped at Monterey on his voyage around the world, in 1786. About fifty years later, when Douglas and Coulter were collecting seeds and specimens of California trees, two scientific names were given the Monterey Pine: *pinus radiata* (the pine with whorls of cones) by a Scotch botanist, David Don; and "*pinus insignis*" (the noble, the remarkable, the distinguished pine) by another Scotch botanist, David Douglas.

Scientific etiquette calls for the use of the first of these names, as it was suggested a little earlier than the second; but anyone who has felt the charm of the Monterey Pine in its native surroundings can understand why a tree-lover like David Douglas called it "*insignis*". The Yellow Pine and the Sugar Pine have a towering glory of their own; but one must travel from the Sierras to the sea to find a pine that has the quiet beauty and the symmetry of the Monterey Pine, when it is not subjected to extreme conditions.

It may be readily recognized anywhere by its deeply furrowed bark and heavy foliage. The

needles grow in clusters of three, occasionally two, except on the island trees, where they are generally found in clusters of two. Sixty or seventy feet is the average height, with a diameter of three or four feet; but a tree may reach a height of a hundred feet, with a diameter of five or six feet.

The cones are whorled along the branches, as "radiata" implies. The grey ghost of an old pine that still stands, though its green days are gone forever, with its great arms knotted with cones, shows this remarkably well. The whorls sometimes lie close enough to cover a branch from base to tip and overlap like mussels on a rock.

In a vigorous tree the cones are nearly hidden by the foliage, and only a parting of heavy bunches of needles will uncover them—silver-grey cones nearest the base of the branch; ripe brown cones a little further along the branch; then the full-grown green cones, like clusters of unripe pears; and last of all, at the branch-tips, are the little purple cones, the latest addition to the family branch, sitting in an expectant whorl.

Single cones may be found on a trunk or in a branch-joint. Grey and old such cones generally are, that have opened and given their seeds to the wind and then have settled back to stay on the



tree five, ten, or even fifteen or twenty years longer. Some of them remain closed for as long a time! Branch cones, too, may be as persistent, but have less of a chance to escape a twist of the wind.

When conditions are just right, cones drop of their own accord. On a warm day in the fall, when there is no wind, a rambler in the woods may hear a muffled thud on the thick mat of needles under a pine. A ripe cone has slipped from its tree. A little pitch-lined pocket on a branch shows where it has come from; and a heavy drip of golden brown pitch on the cone stem shows how easily it has slipped off.

Cones that fall in this way are generally well opened and richly colored. Their thick, elastic scales—a hundred or more—are spread like flower petals, and show the wine red color under their tan tips. No other pine cone has the lacquer-like finish of this Monterey pine cone. The magnificent cone of the Coulter Pine, the graceful tassel of the Sugar Pine, the delicate rosette of the big Yellow Pine, the flower-like cones of the “Tamrac” and the Pinyon are all of softer finish.

Early in the fall of their second year the cones brown and are ready to open if the right temper-

ature strikes them; but this may not happen for five or six years, and even a forest fire may be needed to entice a temperamental pine tree to allow its cones to unfold and free the seeds to spread their wings.

On the warmest days of the year—these may occur in March, September, or November on the Monterey Peninsula—there is a snapping and crackling in the pine woods, that sounds much like the starting of a well-kindled fire. The cones are opening. This delightful bursting continues through the night that follows a warm day; for many a cone that has resisted the sun during the day will stealthily pop open under the stars.

Thousands of little black seeds are free now to sail through the air on their single wings and start on their earthly adventures. Some will only flutter down to the ground and lodge in a bed of pine needles; but the wind will carry others far, and some day a little green-haired tree may appear in a most surprising situation, perhaps standing an inch or two high out of a crack in a street curbing, or sitting contentedly beside a rock or a brick of a garden border, always with a dignity that belongs to a native inheritor of the soil.

In four or five years seedlings may grow into trees ten or fifteen feet high, with abundant, rich green foliage. If they are crowded, the lower branches drop away, and the trunk may be cleared within a few feet of the top. Old pines that have been forced to grow in this way, to a height of seventy-five or a hundred feet, look, at a distance, much like cocoa palms. But where the trees have had room to spread, the lower branches may develop into stout limbs that strike out boldly in the manner of oaks; and when pines of this type have struggled with the coast winds for half a century or more, they may be as contorted as any Monterey Cypress. On the edge of the forest, where the sand has been swept up into dunes, they not only crouch before the wind but are weighted down with sand drifts. Around some of them the sand has circled and settled year after year, and has built up a dune that hides all but the crown of the tree. Who can tell how many fallen pines have lain under these white drifts? When Point Pinos was discovered in 1542, we may well believe that pine groves instead of sandy wastes stretched almost to the water's edge.

But vigorous as a pine may be in battling storms and drifting sands, there are smaller,

insistent torments against which it is powerless. A crowd of boring beetles will in a few years eat out the heart of the sturdiest pine. Pitch, spicy and fragrant, is the food for which they search in stealthy hordes that move in darkness and abhor the light. A trail of sawdust-like refuse may show where they have entered a tree; but once in, it becomes their abode; and they work like bees in a hive to honeycomb it from base to tip. When their work has gone far enough, the tree faints and falls or is toppled over by the wind; or it may die standing upright, as is often the way with a tree.

Then there is the Spanish moss that drapes a tree so gently and so gradually that no menace is apparent until the filmy nets hang from every branch like dripping fog, and the tree begins to draw its breath hard. And there is the dwarf mistletoe that looks like a tuft of cypress foliage caught in the rough bark of a pine, the relentless *Razoumofskya Campylopoda* whose very name sounds a warning of the havoc it may work when once it has settled upon a tree.

There are other living things in the forest that add to its glory and exact but little from the trees. Any moderate sized pine can spare a few of its spring buds for pasturing caterpillars,

and even maintain a lenient attitude toward the hairy offspring of the Monarch Butterfly that ornaments its branches for a few weeks of the year. In the spring a favored tree becomes a rendezvous for thousands of these butterflies. They float in swarms, like colored clouds, among the branches and over and around the tree, when the sun is shining; but when the fog drifts through the forest they hang like bunches of dry leaves blown from the live oaks and caught in the branches of the pine.

Flickers that store acorns in pine trunks may hammer at the bark of a tree with enough persistence to interfere with its health, but the "tap-tap-tap" of the "woodpecker" is part of the music of the forest.

Other birds, hosts of them, live in the forest, and many of them lodge in the heavy foliage of the pines. There is the night heron with its bushel-basket nest, and the titmouse with its miniature Indian basket of a home. Between the heron and the titmouse is a graduated series of gay blue jays and glossy black crows, owls that hoot and owls that moan or drop showers of clear notes from the tree tops; there are pigeons and doves, slender brown thrushes, juncos and towhees, song sparrows and golden warblers. When



the sun begins to light up the mountains across the bay, the chorus that welcomes the day from the woods on the Monterey shore, is a medley—a medley almost as ancient as the pine woods, and they—? They are too ancient to have their years counted.

Four or five generations of pines have lived and fallen since Cabrillo sailed past Point Pinos. Pine woods that then covered the slopes on the water's edge have been buried by sand drifts, and Point Pinos lighthouse stands in the sandy waste, out of which a few sturdy old pines still try to struggle.

On that first voyage of exploration up the rocky, unlighted California coast, in 1542, the ships cast anchor each night, and sailed by day. Could Cabrillo have believed that two or three centuries would pass before the "Cabo de los Pinos" would be lighted for the safety of ships, and towns flourish on the shore of the "big bay" in place of pines!

With all the clearing that has come from the planting of towns, pine-covered slopes are still to be seen, and stretches of untouched forest; but hundreds of chimneys that once puffed out clouds of spicy fumes from pitch logs and forest wood, have tumbled in ruins, or send forth, on

occasion, as does the modern bungalow chimney, modest curls of smoke from corded pine wood.

It is not likely that the earth will lose the Monterey Pine, for it is planted the world over; though its fate may be that of the historic Ginkgo—not a wild tree to be found, but growing everywhere.

Where the pines still hold the land, the wonder of getting almost lost in the woods is yet possible; and the music and color and setting of the woods remains. The woodpecker and the blue jay, the song sparrow and the thrush have not deserted; and the “coax-coix” of frogs in marshes and gravel pits may still be heard when the sun is sinking behind the pines in lakes of crimson and gold. The white fog drifts in and out, veiling or unveiling the pines, or drenching their foliage till every needle drips; and the sea—the blue sea—still breaks in white on the rocks and sands that edge this old pine forest.













